

✓ DR&HS Asks Planning Board About Drew House

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

Duxbury Rural & Historical Society Executive Director Patrick Browne went before the planning board on Monday night seeking information about whether or not selling the society-owned Drew House to fund an endowment would be a feasible option.

Browne said the society had been storing its archives in the first floor of the Drew House. However, once the Wright Building is completed, the society will lease the front section of the building from the town to house the society's century-old archives.

"The second floor of the Drew House is vacant and once we move the archives from the first floor to the Wright Building, the society won't be using the Drew House. We would like to place the Drew House on the market and use the proceeds to make an endowment on the Wright Building," Browne said.

Browne said the society had acquired the home from the Drew family. He said descendants of the family still lived in Duxbury and that they were happy with the society's proposed plans.



The Drew House at 685 Washington St. is owned by the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society.

The Drew House was originally gifted to the society from the family with only the house and the immediate acreage surrounding the house. During the teens and 1920s, Browne said the society acquired the additional acreage of wetlands and marsh surrounding the Drew House. He said where once buildings had sat on this additional property, the society demolished these structures ensuring the land was returned to its prior untouched state. The society now owns 3.8 acres including the Drew House and the surrounding property.

Browne's proposal to the planning board included dividing up this area to sell only the Drew House and the immediate property surrounding it. Jim Hartford, past president of the DR&HS and the volunteer in charge of the society's buildings, said the home would be sold with a historic preservation restriction.

"This would mean that the buyer would have to maintain the footprint, they could not tear down the three sides of the façade and the upgrades made to the home would have to make the property livable in 21st century," Hartford said.

The rest of the land would be kept under the society's control.

Several board members offered their advice with how Browne and Hartford should proceed. Planning Board Clerk Angela Scieszka suggested the society forget dividing up the property and instead

put a conservation restriction on the entire property.

Planning Board member Jim Kimball said dividing up the properties would create a lot without the required 200 feet of frontage, which the board does not allow.

"The area surrounding the house is wetlands, which would restrict what anybody could build in that area. And there are bylaws that do not allow piers right now. But what benefit to the town do you see for your proposal?" Planning Board Chairwoman Amy MacNab asked.

"This would perpetuate the mission of the society which is why the Bluefish River area looks like it does today. It is the society's mission to protect and preserve historic lands and open space," Browne said.

Planning Board Vice Chair George Wadsworth said people in town, like members of the Community Preservation Committee, would not be pleased with the society's plans if they were to move forward with them.

"To have a non-profit whose mission it is to preserve to sell a property for its own gain will make people unhappy," Wadsworth said.

Planning Director Christine Stickney said the proposal was unusual. However, she said even as the property exists currently it is non-conforming as far as wetland and upland are concerned. She said property sits in the wetland protection district and the FEMA velocity zone.

"To me, this proposal has all of the safeguards," Stickney said.

Seeing that the board was not reaching a consensus, MacNab told Browne and Hartford that if they did try to obtain an ANR or approval not required that she couldn't say if the board would endorse it. She said the society could also keep the ownership of the entire lot and utilize restrictions.

"I commend what you're doing, but the rules could change 20 or 50 years down the line," MacNab said.

Stickney added that if an ANR is sought, the board would have 21 days to decide on the proposal.